

BRAVE NEW WORLD, THE FEELIES AND ELINOR GLYN by James Sexton, *English Languages Notes*, vol 35, No. 1, Sept 1997, 35-38.

In Chapter Eleven of *Brave New World* the futuristic flapper Lenina Crowne escorts John the Savage to the Alhambra Feelie Palace to initiate him into the pleasures of the Brave New Worldian cinema. The softly pornographic feature attraction, *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*, tirelessly recounts the romantic details of a twenty-one night stand, the preferred amatory venue within the helicopter being a "famous bearskin, every hair of which . . . could be separately and distinctly felt."¹

Huxley's choice of title and pointed references to love-making on a bearskin rug would certainly have called to mind the notorious tiger-skin love scene in the international best-seller, *Three Weeks* (1907), by the English author Elinor Glyn (1864-1943). Her long string of successful romantic novels culminated in 1927 with the equally successful novella, later turned smash Hollywood movie, *It*, the vehicle which provided Clara Bow with her nickname, "The It Girl," IT, of course, being Glyn's synonym for sex appeal.

Huxley's repeated references to the bearskin-rug rule out a merely coincidental use of the words "three weeks" in the title, for Glyn's public image was clearly associated with love-making on rugs, especially after the wide circulation of the following anonymous versicle:

Would you like to sin
with Elinor Glyn
on a tiger-skin?
Or would you prefer to err
with her on some other fur?²

That Huxley chooses *Three Weeks*—which Glyn helped convert to a popular Hollywood film in 1923—as a typical vehicle for the "feelies" is not surprising. Glyn's early fame had been resuscitated through her Hollywood success. Indeed, in an article which originally appeared in the Hearst newspapers on September 21, 1931, Huxley refers to Glyn's movie, *It*.³ And as early as 1915, he reveals his dismissive attitude to her in a letter from Oxford to his father: "What an odd business it was about the suppression of Lawrence's book, *The Rainbow*. It is always the serious books that get sat on—how much better to suppress Mrs. Glyn."⁴ Thus, it is understandable that Huxley should choose *Three Weeks* as a fittingly bathetic model upon which to base his feelie version of *Othello*. Glyn's novel and *Othello* have in common the murder of adulteresses (real in Glyn's novel, imagined in *Othello*), by jealous husbands. Moreover, the allusion to *Three Weeks* serves to foreshadow a similar fate for Lenina Crowne. John's parallels to Othello are fairly clear: his use of Othello's line "Goats and monkeys" to express sexual disgust, for example. [end p. 36]

But the circumstances surrounding the adulteress's death in *Three Weeks* bear a striking similarity to those surrounding Lenina's presumed demise. Glyn writes:

Everyone knows the story How a certain evil-living King, after a wild orgie of mad drunkenness, rode out with two boon companions to the villa of his Queen, and there, forcing an entrance, ran a dagger through her heart⁵

After John has mentally whipped Lenina and called her strumpet, she invades his solitude only to have John turn on her in fact:

Inaudibly, she spoke again; then . . . stretched out her arms towards the Savage "Strumpet!" The Savage had rushed at her like a madman He was slashing at her with his whip of small cords That plump

incarnation of turpitude writhing in the heather at his feet. "Kill it, kill it, kill it. . ." The Savage went on shouting.⁶

The Savage joins in the ensuing orgy, and whether Lenina is trampled, whipped to death, or finally escapes is unclear. Nevertheless, all three works are linked by the presence of the green-eyed monster, jealousy, a "sin" unknown in *Brave New World's* repressionless dispensation.

For his feelie, Huxley had a ready-made public figure to allude to—Elinor Glyn, the woman whose name, according to movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn, was "synonymous with the discovery of sex appeal for the cinema."⁷

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NOTES

¹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932; London: Chatto and Windus, 1950) 137.

² Allen Churchill quotes this anonymous "catchy rhyme" in *Remember When* (New York: Golden Press, 1967) 58. Marian Fowler attributes it to "some wag" ("Would You Sin With Elinor Glyn?" *Saturday Night*, November, 1996) 114.

³ Aldous Huxley, *Aldous Huxley's Hearst Essays*, ed. James Sexton (New York: Garland, 1994) 4.

⁴ Grover Smith, ed., *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (New York: Harper, 1969) 85.

⁵ Elinor Glyn, *Three Weeks* (New York: Duffield, 1907) 272.

⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* 211.

⁷ Anthony Glyn *Elinor Glyn* (London: Hutchinson, 1955) 279.